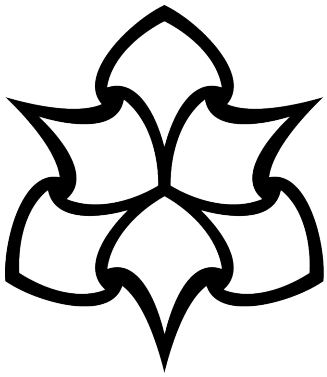

Damian Walford Davies, *Cartographies of Culture: New Geographies of Welsh Writing in English* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012)

I want to begin with the end of *Cartographies of Culture* which, in turn, promises an exciting new beginning for the geographical understanding of Welsh writing in English. In the brief conclusion to his excellent – and handsomely illustrated - monograph, Damian Walford Davies tantalisingly gestures towards the possibility of a 'Digital Literary Atlas of Wales' (DLAW). In making this move, Walford Davies both explicitly and implicitly situates the proposed resource within the context of other digital literary mapping projects currently unfolding across the globe. At present, a range of interdisciplinary digital projects are drawing upon a suite of geovisualisation technologies – including Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and Google Earth - to produce new reader-generated mappings of the literature of space, place and landscape. Under the influence of the positivist literary cartography of Franco Moretti, a number of these projects are celebrating the way in which digital technologies can facilitate 'distant reading': the macro-mapping of large corpora of geographically referenceable literary texts. As Rachel Hewitt has argued, however, 'mapping the geographic references of a text cannot be the first step in a mass hermeneutic process'; instead, post-Morettian (digital) literary map-making ought to be predicated on a critical sensitivity to the complex ways in which the cartographic imagination can be traced in the work of individual writers and specific texts. [1] That is to say, before embarking on large-scale digital distant mapping, the literary geographer first ought to engage in the old-fashioned business of close reading.

[1] Rachel Hewitt, 'Mapping and Romanticism', *Wordsworth Circle*, 42, 2 (2011), 157-65 (p. 158).

In the climactic pages of *Cartographies of Culture*, Walford Davies opens up the possibility that the DLAW might 'enable – and [saliently] perform – a critical literary geography of Welsh writing in English' (p. 206) through the mapping of a large body of place-specific writings. Crucially, though, this brave new digital world of macro-mapping is heralded at the end of a critical study in which the reader's preconceptions of literary cartography have been positively destabilised through a series of ambitiously exploratory analyses of individual works by William Wordsworth, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Brenda Chamberlain and Waldo Williams. With frequent – and occasionally dazzling - critical ingenuity, Walford Davies thereby satisfies Hewitt's not unreasonable demand that a detailed 'exploration of (textual, bibliographic, historical, biographical) evidence of a work's engagement with spatial concerns' should provide the foundation for interrogating the imbrications of the literary and cartographic imaginations.[2]

Cartographies of Culture opens in the customary manner with a concise introduction in which Walford Davies both helpfully retraces the 'spatial turn' across the humanities and social sciences and locates his own critical project within the context of other modes of literary cartography, including the essentially quantitative methodologies of Moretti. It is in Chapter One, though, that the cartographic adventures begin as Walford Davies offers an engagingly experimental reading of that 'arch-Anglo-Welsh utterance' (p. 17), 'Tintern Abbey'. Sharing Angharad Saunders's belief that the work of the critical literary geographer might profitably engage with authorial situatedness, Walford Davies seeks to defamiliarise this most canonical of poems by reconstructing a 'compositional geography' (p. 25): a mode of critical 'biogeography', to use Robert Macfarlane's neologism, in which he tentatively examines how 'Tintern Abbey' might have been written, at least in part, 'on river and estuary

[2] Hewitt, p. 158.

water, both eddying with tidal currents' (p. 26). [3] Making innovative use of Tidal Prediction software, Walford Davies charts a 'hydrographic' reading in which the fluvial movements of river and estuary are mapped onto the fluid form of Wordsworth's lyric: a process which unconceals the 'layered [cartographies] of culture' (p. 42) embedded within the poetic text.

In the following chapter, Walford Davies travels north to the Vale of Clwyd to offer a 'psychocartographic' reading of a 'Dominical'- 'a thirty-minute practice sermon' (p. 43) – delivered by Hopkins in 1877. Here, the author's preoccupations converge with those of spatial theologians, as he contextualises Hopkins's – not entirely successful – attempt to construct a 'transhistorical map' (p. 47) in which Biblical geographies are imaginatively transplanted onto the contoured topography surrounding St Beuno's College, Tremeirchion. Walford Davies's analysis does not become circumscribed by the particularities of the local landscape, however, as he places Hopkins's performative sermon within the palimpsestic contexts of Welsh 'geopiety': a 'spiritual identification with place, inescapably embedded in a particular socio- and geo-political context' (p. 63), and through which an idealised conceptualisation of Wales has been mapped in relation to the contested geographies of the Holy Land.

Chapters 3 and 4 are both dedicated to the difficult-to-define work of Brenda Chamberlain. The fact that she is the only writer to be granted two chapters gives *Cartographies of Culture* some structural unevenness; and Walford Davies might have expanded the temporal parameters of his project (1798-1970) to enable him to replace one of the chapters on Chamberlain with an exploration of, say, the creative cartographies of the contemporary poets, Ian Davidson and Zoë Skoulding. Clearly, though, the more expansive

[3] Angharad Saunders, 'Literary Geography: Reforging the Connections', *Progress in Human Geography*, 34, 4 (2010), 436-52; and Robert Macfarlane, *The Old Ways: A Journey on Foot* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2012), p. 33.

textual space afforded to Chamberlain allows the author to construct an impressively comprehensive, and characteristically nuanced, interrogation of her visual and textual mapping practices which, in turn, functions as a critical rehabilitation of this unjustly neglected writer and artist. Chapter 3 concentrates on 'Winter Rhythms in Island Life': two charts which Chamberlain made during her residency on Bardsey Island and which jointly offer 'a critical map – a metacartography – of [her] literary and graphic work as a whole' (p. 84). Central to Walford Davies's spatial argument is the way in which Chamberlain's cartographic vision resists accusations of insularity through the construction of 'a European map of island spaces (both literally and imaginatively inhabited) and a cartographic meditation on the condition of "islandness"' (p. 78). For Chamberlain, then, Bardsey constitutes part of an archipelagic chain linking Aran, Westphalia and the Inner German Border, and Ídhra and Léros. In the following chapter, the critical gaze shifts to Chamberlain's only novel, *The Water-castle* (1964), and Walford Davies coins the term, 'moatedness', to describe how the writer 'extends the study of enislement [. . .] into continental territory and into a new conception of insularization-as-cultural-asylum' (p. 125). The primary focus of the chapter is a series of persuasive close readings of this 'hybrid journal-novel' (p. 142). Walford Davies then uses *Poems with Drawings* (1969) to illustrate how Chamberlain's dynamic and fluid cartographic imagination is ultimately 'imprisoned' in the flat abstractions, and disorientating blankness, of 'Euclidean, Cartesian space' (p. 168).

The final cartographic reading is of Waldo Williams's celebrated 1956 poem, 'Mewn Dau Gae' ('In Two Fields'). Walford Davies diligently considers multiple translations of this poem of place and considers the process of translation itself as a form of mapping: an uncontroversial proposition; but, at the same time, an applied acknowledgement of the metaphorical elasticity of the term which jars a little with astute metacritical observations

made in the overarching theoretical introduction to the book. As in previous chapters, the text is rooted in the material actualities of the Welsh landscape as Walford Davies debunks the popular misconception that the poem is located in Pembrokeshire to illustrate that it is, in fact, situated in neighbouring Carmarthenshire. Once again, though, the cartographic reading moves out from the local to the international as Walford Davies illustrates how Williams uses the near-at-hand landscape to meditate on wider issues of mapping and bordering which, in turn, link west Wales with contemporary Korea and Cyprus. 'In Two Fields', therefore, is read as an ambitious work of 'political cartography' (p. 177).

Cartographies of Culture is not without flaws. The wide-ranging references (critical, historical, geographical, theoretical and so on) admirably reveal the cartographic complexities of the primary texts; but there are occasions when the reader might be left slightly overwhelmed by the sheer volume of contextual information. For instance, although the chapter on 'Tintern Abbey' is an excitingly experimental work of critical literary geography, some readers might be left slightly frustrated by the way in which the genuinely original close reading is repeatedly deferred. There are also some minor typographic errors: in Chapter 4, for example, Chamberlain's *Tide-race* (intriguingly) morphs into *Tide-trace* (p. 110); and, in a footnote, William Gilpin is erroneously listed as 'Gipin' (p. 218). These, though, are pedantic quibbles. Ultimately, the exemplary close readings threaded throughout *Cartographies of Culture* open up new ways of thinking about the shifting cartographic imagination in Welsh writing in English; and, through the detailed critical analyses of cartographic texts frequently characterised by fluidity and porosity, Walford Davies offers a timely reminder that the digital reader-generated mapping of literary geographies needs to be 'faithful to more than the measurable' (p. 209).

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